

Why equality is not the same as equity

The words “equality” and “equity” look similar, sound similar, and even point to the same concept of fairness. So it is understandable if, at first, you think they mean the same thing.

As the YALI Network kicks off its #YALISTands4All campaign focused on human rights, not only the rights but also the opportunities of minority groups and other communities will be discussed in greater detail. Understanding the difference between equality and equity is a great way to start thinking about human rights in your community.

Put in the simplest terms, equality means “sameness,” and equity means “fairness.” People who grew up impoverished are probably familiar with the difference, since they had to work much harder to receive the same level of education as many of their peers or to find networking opportunities that came more easily to others.

(State Dept./Doug Thompson)



Should every student receive exactly the same amount of resources and funding for their education? That is a question of equality. Should students who come from more difficult circumstances get more in order to ensure that they can catch up? That is a question of equity. By ensuring equity, a society can ultimately enjoy equality.

Leslie Lefkow, deputy director for Africa at the organization [Human Rights Watch](#), said these types of questions fall into a broader discussion of access and the differences in how various governments deal with economic, social and cultural rights.

Unfortunately, “what we often see is an overlap between corruption and marginalization of vulnerable sectors of society and access to state attention or resources,” she said.

Governments can address equity by taking action that favors disadvantaged groups. They can devote additional resources, for example, to ensure poorer households are not disproportionately burdened with health or educational expenses, or require businesses and all public services to be [accessible to people with disabilities](#).

But there are also steps you can take for your business, organization or community to be proactive and demonstrate awareness. For example:

- Create a public statement of nondiscrimination with regard to gender, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation and include it with your written and online materials.
- Actively recruit members of marginalized or disadvantaged communities to be a part of your organization or create formal partnerships that encourage cooperation.
- Train staff, teachers and others not only to value and respect diversity, but also to see each individual as themselves — not as a category or a member of a certain group.

As an individual, don’t forget about your own role as an internet user. Lefkow said the internet has “obviously been an incredible tool for people economically ... to access markets and to strengthen entrepreneurs and businesses.” But “it also has real potential downsides, like being a vehicle for

hate speech and incitement.”

Stay tuned to the YALI Network to find out how to participate in our upcoming human rights course. Earn your certificate and share your stories of what you are doing to promote inclusiveness! Learn more and get involved at yali.state.gov/4all!
